United Nations E/AC.51/2001/2

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
27 March 2001

Original: English

Committee for Programme and Coordination
Forty-first session
11 June-6 July 2001
Item 4 (b) of the provisional agenda*
Programme questions: evaluation

In-depth evaluation of sustainable development

Note by the Secretary-General

In conformity with paragraph 5 (e) (i) of General Assembly resolution 48/218 B of 29 July 1994, and of General Assembly resolution 54/244 of 23 December 1999, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit herewith the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the in-depth evaluation of sustainable development. The report has been reviewed by the relevant departments and offices. The Secretary-General takes note of its findings and concurs with its recommendations.

* E/AC.51/2001/1.

01-30667 (E) 240401

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the in-depth evaluation of sustainable development

Summary

The present report reviews the work of the subprogramme on sustainable development since its establishment in 1992 with the focus on current programme implementation issues.

The main objective of the subprogramme is to ensure the effective and coordinated implementation of the United Nations sustainable development agenda. This objective is pursued through support to the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development and the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development. The Division for Sustainable Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs implements the subprogramme and acts as the secretariat of the Commission and of the Inter-Agency Committee. Since 1997, after reorganization of the Secretariat, a separate programme of technical assistance for the development and management of natural resources was added to the Division.

The main findings of the in-depth evaluation are presented in section III (Secretariat support to intergovernmental processes), section IV (monitoring the implementation of sustainable development goals), section V (coordinated approaches to implementing sustainable development goals), section VI (dialogue with and involvement of major groups) and section VII (support to international cooperation and national programmes). In section VIII recommendations are made on support to intergovernmental processes, streamlining reporting to the Commission — including national reporting — enhancing the quality of information and facilitating access to it, strengthening support to the Inter-Agency Committee and participation in the coordination of United Nations country programmes.

The report proposes that the Department of Economic and Social Affairs should promote dialogue between members of the Commission and government representatives engaged in other intergovernmental processes. Regarding the reporting on sustainable development issues to intergovernmental bodies, the Secretariat should make proposals to the Commission and other relevant bodies on the format, scope and calendar of reporting so that, in the future, reporting can more effectively facilitate the preparations of government representatives for the annual or biennial sessions. To reduce the burden placed on countries to report to an increasing number of intergovernmental forums, the Division for Sustainable Development and members of the Inter-Agency Committee should develop procedures to limit additional requests for national information to information not readily available elsewhere in the United Nations system. The Division's initiatives to ensure that regional and subregional perspectives are given adequate attention at the Commission and other relevant forums need to be further developed in collaboration with the United Nations regional commissions and other regional organizations. The involvement of United Nations organizations, in particular organizations with regional or national offices, in support of the implementation of national sustainable development strategies, needs to be more effectively organized. The Division should further develop ways and means to draw from these organizations specialized expertise to support the work of the Commission and ongoing activities, such as the Commission's programme of sustainable development indicators.

Contents

		Paragraphs	Page
I.	Introduction	1–3	4
II.	United Nations programme on sustainable development	4–10	4
	A. Intergovernmental processes	4–6	4
	B. Secretariat arrangements	7–10	5
III.	Secretariat support to intergovernmental processes	11–24	6
	A. Secretariat services: parliamentary documentation	12–14	7
	B. Support to the inter-sessional work of the Commission	15–17	8
	C. Inclusion of representatives from economic and social sectors	18–19	9
	D. Understanding of sustainable development	20	9
	E. Integration of the social, economic and environmental aspects of sustainable development	21–24	10
IV.	Monitoring the implementation of sustainable development goals	25–32	11
	A. Streamlining national reporting	25–27	11
	B. Sustainable development indicators	28–29	12
	C. Facilitating access to information	30–32	13
V.	Coordinated approaches to implementing sustainable development goals	33–41	14
	A. Examples of coordination arrangements under the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development	34–38	16
	B. Strengthening the Inter-Agency Committee task managers system	39–41	18
VI.	Dialogue with and involvement of major groups	42–46	19
VII.	Support to international cooperation and national programmes	47–62	21
	A. Support to international cooperation	47–50	21
	B. Support to national programmes	51–62	22
	1. Sustainable development strategies and programmes	51–54	22
	2. Programme of technical assistance of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs	55–62	23
VIII.	Conclusions and recommendations	63–67	26

I. Introduction

1. At its fortieth session, the Committee for Programme and Coordination recommended that an in-depth evaluation of sustainable development (subprogramme 28.4 of the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001 revised in 1998) be prepared for consideration by the Committee in 2001.[1]

2. The subprogramme, established in 1992 after the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, is implemented by the Division for Sustainable Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. In its in-depth evaluation, the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) reviewed the work of the Division since 1992, with the focus on the period 1998-2001. The present report provides the evaluation findings according to the main activities identified in the medium-term plan: Secretariat support to intergovernmental processes (section III), monitoring the implementation of sustainable development goals (section IV), coordinated approaches to implementing sustainable development goals (section V), dialogue with and involvement of major groups (section VI) and support to international cooperation and national programmes (section VII).

3. In the conduct of the in-depth evaluation, OIOS utilized the following categories of information: (a) United Nations documents; (b) information from internal administrative and working documents of the Department; (c) publications on programmes of sustainable development published by other international organizations, governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations; (d) structured interviews and consultations with a number of government officials, staff of the Department, staff of other Secretariat departments, including the regional commissions, organizations of the United Nations system and other international organizations, representatives of the major groups as defined in Agenda 21; and (e) in addition to the categories of information already described, OIOS used the information obtained from responses to the following three questionnaires: (i) a questionnaire on the quality of secretariat support provided by the Division sent to government representatives involved in the work of the Commission; (ii) a questionnaire on international support provided to national strategies and programmes sent to national experts who had attended meetings sponsored by the Division; and (iii) a questionnaire on the impact of the Conference on activities of the non-governmental sector to representatives of major groups who had participated in the work of the Commission.

II. United Nations programme on sustainable development

A. Intergovernmental processes

4. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held at Rio de Janeiro from 3 to 14 June 1992, adopted the Declaration on Environment and Development,[2] a set of principles to guide action on environment and development, and Agenda 21,[3] a programme of action for sustainable development built on "the acceptance of the need to take a balanced and integrated approach to environment and development questions".[4] Agenda 21 which encompasses programme areas in the environment, economic and social domains "marks the beginning of a new global partnership for sustainable development".[5] In paragraph 2 of its resolution 47/191 of 22 December 1992, the General Assembly requested the Economic and Social Council, as recommended in Agenda 21, to set up a high-level Commission on Sustainable Development as a functional commission of the Council to ensure effective follow-up to the Conference, as well as to enhance international cooperation and rationalize the intergovernmental decision-making capacity for the integration of environment and development issues and to examine the progress of the implementation of Agenda 21 at the national, regional and international levels.

5. The Conference contributed to the further development of international law in the field of sustainable development — one of the purposes of the new global partnership, as proclaimed in principle 27 of the Rio Declaration. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change[6] and the Convention on Biological Diversity[7] were opened for signature at the Conference. As recommended by Agenda 21, an intergovernmental negotiating committee was established for the elaboration of an international convention to combat desertification. The convention was finalized in 1994.[8] Following up on other recommendations, the General Assembly decided to convene, in 1994, the first Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing

States. The statement of principles for a global consensus on the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests adopted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development[9] has been, since then, the basis for continued intergovernmental policy dialogue.

6. In 1997, at its nineteenth special session, the General Assembly reviewed progress achieved over the five years that had passed since the Conference. In paragraph 16 of the annex to its resolution S-19/2 of 28 June 1997, the Assembly stated that "organizations and programmes of the United Nations system have played an important role in the progress made in the implementation of Agenda 21". By its resolution 55/199 of 20 December 2000, the Assembly decided to organize a 10-year review of progress in 2002 at the summit level — the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Both the success and the difficulties of the programme evaluated in the present report are well formulated in the following assessment:

> "The United Nations has been remarkably effective in initiating, guiding and promoting reflection on sustainable development. However, it is clear that the drastic reorientation of our economies in the direction of sustainable development is a matter that cannot depend on the United Nations alone, nor even, in that respect, other international organizations".[10]

B. Secretariat arrangements

7. At the end of 1992, the Secretary-General decided to establish within the new Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development, as called for in General Assembly resolution 47/191, a clearly identifiable secretariat to provide support for the Commission on Sustainable Development and the other new bodies, the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development and the High-level Advisory Board, established to follow up on the Conference. This function was entrusted to the Division for Sustainable Development. The Division provides support, in addition to the Commission, for the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources for Development, a subsidiary body of the Economic and Social Council, and is also responsible for the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.[11]

8. Agenda 21 stressed the "need for a coordination mechanism under the direct leadership of the Secretary-General" for effective monitoring "of the involvement of the United Nations system in the follow-up to the Conference" (Agenda 21, para. 38.16). To that end, the Administrative Committee for Coordination established, as its standing subsidiary body, the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development. To organize its work, the Committee followed a decentralized allocation of responsibilities: a number of organizations or inter-agency mechanisms were designated task managers for various programme areas of Agenda 21 where they had particular expertise to facilitate the coordination task of the Committee. The task managers are responsible, in particular for information exchange, catalysing joint activities and preparing, in collaboration with concerned organizations, coordinated reports on activities to follow up Agenda 21. The Division for Sustainable Development is responsible for strengthening coordinated approaches through the Committee, for which the Division provides secretariat. The Division is also assigned the function of task manager for several cross-sectoral issues. As can be seen from the arrangements described above, originally, the functions of the Division consisted mainly of providing support to intergovernmental bodies and to the coordination of implementation of Agenda 21 by United Nations organizations.

9. In 1997, the reorganization of the Secretariat aimed at reducing overlap and fragmentation in its work as well as enhancing substantive support for the intergovernmental processes in the related spheres. A new department, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, consolidated all Secretariat headquarters activities in the social, economic and environmental domains. As a result of the reorganization, technical cooperation activities previously carried out by the Department for Development Support and Management Services were assigned to the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and those corresponding to natural resources, water, energy and infrastructure were integrated into the programme of work of the Division. The most important function of the Division, in terms of allocation of regular budget resources, remains secretariat servicing of the Commission and related intergovernmental processes. This function represented nearly two thirds of the Division's normative activities/workload during the biennium 1998-1999. It includes the preparation of parliamentary

documentation, support to the Commission's inter-sessional work and substantive servicing of meetings — more than 300 meetings for the period 1998-1999. Regular budget resources available for this function were comparable to the resources available to other of the Department's divisions responsible for the follow-up to other major conferences. During the period, the Division's regular budget expenditures were $11.9 million. Extrabudgetary expenditures were $22.7 million, of which $1.9 million were for support to the work of the Commission and $20 million were for technical cooperation activities. In addition, $2.3 million was allocated under section 21 of the programme budget, Technical cooperation, to support these activities.

10. Considering the large number of programme areas covered by Agenda 21 — more than 100 according to the Secretariat count — requiring technical expertise that could not be assembled in the Division, the General Assembly recommended that the Division be reinforced, inter alia, by secondments from other relevant bodies and agencies of the United Nations system and from national Governments in such areas as might be required (resolution 47/191, para. 32 (f)). A number of experts were seconded from national Governments. As resources to fund secondments were rarely available, secondments from other United Nations organizations were limited to experts on forest issues — funded through extrabudgetary resources — with the positive results described in paragraphs 16 and 37 below, and occasional part-time secondments in other areas. Several members of the Inter-Agency Committee stated to OIOS that the situation would continue given the resource constraints faced by many United Nations agencies.

III. Secretariat support to intergovernmental processes

11. In 1992, the General Assembly recommended that the Commission on Sustainable Development adopt a programme of work that would integrate in an effective manner related sectoral and cross-sectoral components of Agenda 21 (resolution 47/191, para. 12). Between 1994 and 1996, the Commission had to review implementation issues of all chapters of Agenda 21, that is, more than a dozen broad issues each year. In 1997 three new areas were added to Agenda 21 — transport, energy and tourism. In 1997, to focus intergovernmental policy discussions on a limited number of strategic priority issues, the Assembly adopted a multi-year programme of work for the Commission for the period 1998-2002, with emphasis on linkages between resource management and the role of economic actors and major groups. For illustration, the work programme for the eighth session of the Commission is reproduced in table 1 below. It was expected that "such an approach would stimulate greater attention to cross-cutting issues such as population, gender, health, impact on children, production and consumption patterns, and to means of implementation" (A/S-19/6, annex, para. 12). Two "overriding issues" — poverty, and consumption and production patterns — would be addressed systematically under each agenda item. However, as can be seen from the list of relevant chapters of Agenda 21, the selected "main issues" cover a large number of programme areas each time.

Table 1
Programme of work of the Commission on Sustainable Development at its eighth session, 24 April to 5 May 2000 (resolution S-19/2, annex, appendix)

2000 session: Overriding issues: poverty/consumption and production patterns

Sectoral theme: Integrated planning and management of land resources	Cross-sectoral theme: Financial resources/trade and investment/ economic growth	Economic sector/major group: Agriculture (including forestry) International Day of Indigenous People
Main issues for an integrated discussion under the above theme:	Main issues for an integrated discussion under the above theme:	Main issues for an integrated discussion under the above theme:
Agenda 21, chapters 2-8, 10-37 and 40	Agenda 21, chapters 2-4, 23-33, 36-38 and 40	Agenda 21, chapters 2-7, 10-16, 18-21, 23-34, 37 and 40

A. Secretariat services: parliamentary documentation

12. All government representatives responding to the OIOS survey on substantive secretariat support to the Commission on Sustainable Development stated that the contribution of the Division for Sustainable Development to the planning of meetings and servicing during the meetings was satisfactory. Most respondents considered the quality of the documentation provided by the Secretariat to be satisfactory. However, half of the respondents stated that they were not satisfied with the late circulation of documents. Stopgap measures such as the circulation of advance unedited copies were inadequate when the different language versions were needed by national experts to prepare more effectively. Also, regarding the work of a regional group, it was stated that reports, which contained many new ideas, were made available after the group had already coordinated its positions; opportunities to enrich the outcome of the Commission rather than rehearsing old debates were missed. The Division explained that very often the delays had been caused by problems in the workflow of Conference Services. Also, if the documents submission schedule was rigorously adhered to, new ideas generated from inter-sessional processes, especially those completed at a date close to the Commission sessions, might not be incorporated. Respondents understood the reasons that delayed the preparation of documents, and to facilitate the circulation of new information they suggested actions such as the creation of electronic message boards with access restricted to delegations. Other suggestions included notifications, sent to missions and government focal points, of the Division's contact persons for the different items on the agenda of the Commission.

13. The large amount of documentation submitted in the few weeks preceding the Commission was another source of difficulties. The number of documents submitted to the Commission had been reduced (see table 2 below). The Division had tried to limit the scope of documentation but was still requested to prepare reports for each of the themes to be covered in the yearly reviews. Government representatives responding to the OIOS survey stated that the number of documents was still a problem. They also stated that, owing to the technical nature of issues that reports normally dealt with, more support was needed from the Secretariat. For example, half of the respondents considered that a summary of each report should be provided well in advance of meetings and that Secretariat briefings should be organized on key reports, highlighting their policy implications and clarifying technical concepts.

Table 2
Number of documents submitted to the Commission on Sustainable Development and comparator

	Number of documents prepared by the Secretariat	*Total number of documents*
Commission:		
Sustainable development (1996)	35	67
Sustainable development (2000)	25	40
Comparator:		
Social development (2000)	7	26

Source: Annual reports of the Commission on Sustainable Development (*Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1996, Supplement No.8* (E/1996/28) and ibid., *2000, Supplement No.9* (E/2000/29)); and the Commission for Social Development (*Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2000, Supplement No.6* (E/2000/26 and Corr. 1)).

14. In 1993, when basic decisions were made by the Inter-Agency Committee on its methods of work, it was agreed that the Committee's task managers would "prepare, in collaboration with concerned organizations, coordinated inputs for the consolidated analytical reports of the Secretary-General which will focus on common United Nations system strategies for the implementation of Agenda 21" (ACC/1993/24, para. 15). In practice, the Division was frequently reduced to collating separate papers as they were transmitted to the Division. On several occasions, the Division's focal points have had to re-draft papers completely at the last minute to meet the quality standards expected. In preparation for the 2002 Summit, the Division set guidelines that promote the collective preparation by members of the Inter-Agency Committee of one review report to cover several chapters of Agenda 21, where possible. Committee members, although agreeing on the Division's approach, commented to OIOS that such reporting would not provide sufficient information on their activities. Inter-Agency Committee consultations on the purpose of future reporting to the Commission would be useful.

B. Support to the inter-sessional work of the Commission

15. At its nineteenth special session, the General Assembly stated that "inter-sessional ad hoc working groups should help to focus the Commission's sessions by identifying key elements to be discussed and important problems to be addressed within specific items of the Commission's programme of work" (resolution S/19-2, annex, para. 133 (f)). Several factors are limiting the effectiveness of the Commission's inter-sessional work. Frequently, inter-sessional meetings are held too close to the annual session of the Commission and their outcome has a limited influence on it. Also, government representatives responding to the OIOS survey perceived that documents submitted by the Secretariat did not always offer a balanced presentation of issues. At the Ad Hoc Open-Ended Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Energy and Sustainable Development, on 6 March 2000, the Group of 77 and China emphasized that more time should be given for inputs from various sources, including inputs of regional perspectives, which had not been reflected in the Secretary-General's report and the world energy assessment report. At the meetings themselves, the uneven expertise available to the different regions (see table 3 below) may not ensure that their perspectives are well taken into account. At the 1998 consultative meeting among regional institutions, participants recognized the need to strengthen the links between the Commission process and the regional and subregional processes. Several suggestions were put forward, such as participation in the consultative process of drafting Secretary-General's reports and organization of regional meetings focused on specific themes to be discussed at the forthcoming sessions of the Commission where the particular regions might interact with the Commission's Bureau and other members of the Commission.

Table 3

Delegations to the Inter-sessional Ad Hoc Working Group on Integrated Planning and Management of Land Resources and on Agriculture (28 February-3 March 2000)

Number of countries members of the Commission attending	*Total number of delegates*	*Delegates from ministries and central institutions*
Economic Commission for Europe region (17 countries)	130	94
Other regions (16 countries)	75	28
Total	**205**	**122**

Source: E/CN.17/2000/11.

16. Government representatives responding to the OIOS survey gave examples of contributions by the Commission's secretariat, which facilitates intergovernmental agreement, such as proposals of the Division for Sustainable Development on the preparatory process for the 2002 Summit. They stressed that the documents and substantive advice from the secretariat on forest issues had made it possible to narrow the differences between delegations and focus the discussions efficiently. It should be noted that, in this case, the work of the secretariat was supported by numerous government sponsored expert meetings and studies. Between May 1996 and October 1999 not less than 20 meetings and studies explored several very complex and sensitive issues at stake. The same level of preparation does not exist for other topics on the Commission's agenda. Numerous meetings are organized worldwide every year on issues relevant to the Commission's work but the active exchange of information desirable with Commission working groups does not always take place in the form and at the time needed. The Division uses a trust fund for support of the Commission's work in part to organize expert group meetings and assist representatives to participate in meetings. The fund's income — approximately $2.8 million — did not increase as expected during the biennium 1998-1999.

17. For most topics, Secretariat inputs are prepared by organizations away from Headquarters. Since the Division does not have the expertise to address substantively all issues as they arise, in inter-sessional activity throughout the year, delegations involved in the Commission's processes are not necessarily briefed as needed on new developments taking place in other forums. The Committee on Energy and Natural Resources for Development is required to ensure that its own work programme is structured in a manner that could enable it to contribute to the work of the Commission.[12] The Division services the Committee and prepares reports and background papers to facilitate its work. It is too early to assess how useful this work will be.

C. Inclusion of representatives from economic and social sectors

18. The Commission was established in particular "to enhance international cooperation and rationalize the intergovernmental decision-making capacity for the integration of environment and development issues" (General Assembly resolution 47/191, para. 2). For the Commission to better promote policies that integrate the different dimensions of sustainability, the General Assembly considered that the Commission should make concerted efforts to attract the greater involvement in its work of ministers and high-level national policy makers responsible for specific economic and social sectors (resolution S-19/2, annex, para. 133 (a)). Limited progress is noted (see table 4 below) at the ministerial level. At the lower levels, a better balance is achieved: a quarter of all delegates from central institutions attending the eighth session of the Commission belonged to sectors other than environment and foreign affairs. In its comments on an earlier draft of the present report, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) stated that, as there were many forums that demand the attendance of ministers, it was important to make those meetings relevant to their needs. To that end, ministries should be involved in setting the agenda of such meetings. Also, the participation of national Governments might be increased by holding meetings at the subregional level as much as possible.

Table 4
Composition of delegations at sessions of the Commission

	1996	*2000*
Total number of delegates from ministries and central institutions	380	346
Ministerial level delegates		
Environment	13	17
Foreign affairs	-	5
Finance, planning and specialized sectors	2	5

Source: *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1996, Supplement No. 8* (E/1996/28) and ibid., *2000, Supplement No. 6* (E/2000/29).

19. The same difficulties exist in other forums where a better balance of specialists is equally desirable. For example, at the Committee on Trade and Environment of the World Trade Organizations (WTO), only one tenth of the delegates are environment specialists. In October 2000, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), in collaboration with WTO and the multilateral environmental agreements, convened a meeting to enhance informal dialogue between trade and environment officials, the attendance of a large number of environmental officials from developing countries being funded by UNEP. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has convened a series of meetings with both trade and environment specialists and the UNEP-UNCTAD Capacity-Building Task Force on Trade, Environment and Development, established in 2000, will seek to promote the dialogue among experts and decision makers in these sectors.

D. Understanding of sustainable development

20. One of the core functions of the Division for Sustainable Development is "enhancing the understanding and implementation of sustainable development" (ST/SGB/1997/9, para.16.2 (c)). In 1997, the Administrative Committee on Coordination noted that "a key difficulty faced by the United Nations system is that not all governing and policy-making bodies have the same understanding of the concept of sustainable development. In some cases, sustainability

is equated with environmentally sound management of natural resources, to the neglect of broader social and economic issues" (A/S-19/6, annex, appendix, para. 2). The work of the Commission itself is affected by this lack of clarity. For example, in 2000, at the eighth session of the Commission, the dialogue "between major groups and Governments started with the question raised by the non-governmental organizations how to define 'sustainable agriculture' in contrast with 'agriculture' [...]. While the discussion did not lead to a common definition, there was consensus among stakeholders on the need to continue the debate".[13] It is generally considered that there is no single blueprint for sustainable development and that prescriptive guidelines by international organizations do not succeed. Capacity 21, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) programme supporting national capacity-building for sustainable development, developed guidance material on issues and options for sustainable development based on the programme's country experience. The key characteristics of national strategies for sustainable development, which evolved from this work, as encouraged by the Inter-Agency Committee and national participants in Capacity 21, were further developed during regional consultations organized by the Division and other organizations. A number of organizations are collecting good practices and case studies on the implementation of different chapters of Agenda 21 but unified analysis from a sustainable development perspective is limited. It is considered that further work in this area and for the integrated programme approach referred to in paragraph 21 below needs to draw upon solid country experiences in formulating and implementing sustainable development programmes.

E. Integration of the social, economic and environmental aspects of sustainable development

21. The Division for Sustainable Development is expected to promote better integration of the social, economic and environmental aspects of sustainable development in the programmes of the United Nations. It requires emphasis not only on the integration of the relevant components of Agenda 21 but also on incorporating "the results of other major United Nations conferences held in recent years".[14]

Major conferences follow-up

22. The Economic and Social Council has decided that its functional commissions should focus on the core issue relating to the conference for which they were responsible, and obtain inputs from other bodies on related issues. Since 1998, the Commission on Sustainable Development has not dealt directly with those thematic areas of Agenda 21 that were developed by the outcomes of other conferences — notably poverty eradication and population. The functional commissions have attempted to reinforce each other's work through new forms of collaboration. For example, the Commission on Population and Development received presentations made by secretariats of other commissions, including the Division. However, the lack of financial resources did not permit annual meetings of the chairpersons of the functional commissions to discuss ways to enhance coordination and cooperation.

23. Regarding progress in the inclusion of sustainable development perspectives in social and economic areas, General Assembly resolution S-23/3 of 10 June 2000 on further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted at the five-year review of the Fourth World Conference on Women, is one of the few documents to refer explicitly to sustainable development. The report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997-2006) (A/54/316) does not mention any sustainable development perspective. At the national level, most poverty programmes "do not address the issue of environment and natural resources, even in countries where environmental degradation has a major impact on the poor" (E/2000/57, para. 53). It is noted as well that "in many countries, there has been relatively limited progress in integrating economic, social and other areas in the context of national sustainable development strategies" (ibid., para. 52). As a result of the present division of labour, the relation between sustainable development and poverty eradication, one of the two overriding issues on the Commission's agenda, is not addressed comprehensively by any functional commission of the Council. In its comments on an earlier draft of the present report, UNEP stated to OIOS that it was a major shortcoming that the Commission did not deal with cross-sectoral issues such as poverty and population. The Inter-Agency Committee members

stated to OIOS that, in particular, the Committee and the Division did not analyse how poverty eradication related to the different chapters of Agenda 21. Such an analysis could serve as a basis for more concrete discussions in other sectors of the United Nations.

Other issues

24. The Commission on Sustainable Development adopted, in 1994, the Division's proposals on a programme for the transfer of technology, cooperation and capacity building and, in 1995, the international work programme on changing consumption and production patterns — the other overriding issue on the Commission's agenda. In 1997, the General Assembly noted only marginal progress in this area. The Commission discussed regularly the issue of financial resources and mechanisms, which play a key role in the implementation of Agenda 21. Between 1994 and 2000, the Division organized a series of five expert group meetings, which provided inputs to the Commission and its working groups. Expert meetings provided analysis and developed policy options on important unresolved issues. The last expert group meeting, held at Nairobi in December 1999, discussed such questions as new policy approaches in external finance and the integration of environmental finance into mainstream public finance. In 2000, amid concerns about the lack of progress in the fulfilment of the commitments made at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in this area, the Commission considered that the expert group report would be a useful input to the preparatory process of the 2002 High-level International Intergovernmental Event on Financing for Development.[15] In his report to the Preparatory Committee for the High-level Event, the Secretary-General proposed recommendations that encompass "macroeconomic and financial policies and institutions that can be sustained economically and socially" (A/AC.257/12, para. 146). The recommendations do not address issues of the environment.

IV. Monitoring the implementation of sustainable development goals

A. Streamlining national reporting

25. Monitoring "the implementation of sustainable development goals through the assessment of data collected at the national, regional and international levels" is one of the main objectives of the Division for Sustainable Development.[16] As decided by the Commission on Sustainable Development in 1993, the Division invites Governments and organizations to submit the relevant information to the Commission. The proportion of countries reporting to the Commission each year ranged from one third to one fifth of all Member States. Insufficient capacity to prepare the reports and the burden placed on countries to report to an increasing number of intergovernmental forums are given as some of the reasons for low levels of response. In addition, questions have been raised about the usefulness of the information. As reports reach the Secretariat well beyond suggested deadlines, it is difficult to integrate the country information in the substantive reports prepared for the Commission.

26. The Commission requested the Secretary-General, in cooperation with interested States, to provide it with proposals for streamlining national reporting. The Division and the regional commissions explored the possibility for the commissions to take the lead after 1997 in monitoring national progress in the implementation of Agenda 21 and related agreements, and to report these to the Commission. For example, the Sofia Declaration[17] invited the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) to undertake environmental performance reviews for countries in Europe that are not members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). It was noted that this exercise, however, was time- and resource-intensive. For other regions, alternative models might need to be explored. Since 1998, the Division's guidelines for reporting sent to Member States have focused on the specific agenda items of each session of the Commission. In spite of this focus, the guidelines sent in 2000 in preparation for the ninth session of the Commission contained 180 questions on five different topics, with a number of remarkably broad requests, such as the request to assess the impact of, or possible effects of, trade liberalization, privatization and globalization on the allocation and consumption patterns of energy in the country. Representatives of United Nations organizations preparing reports for the Commission on specific issues stated to OIOS that the usefulness of responses received was very uneven and that, on some issues, more detailed information was already available to them through the regular programmes of their organization. It appears that consultations among

relevant programmes are not sufficiently systematic to limit the range of questions to needed and reliable information. A meeting of national reporting focal points is scheduled for 2001 in New York to discuss the issue of streamlining. It is also noted that the new Environmental Management Group, with UNEP providing its secretariat, decided in January 2001 that all reporting on bio-related conventions would be condensed in a simplified format.

27. Agenda 21 noted the inadequate coordination between United Nations programmes related to development data. There exist at present several new mechanisms, such as the common country assessment — a country-based process developed by the United Nations Development Group for reviewing and analysing the national development situation, which promote the development of inter-agency and global development data sets. It has to be established how these mechanisms serve the intent of Agenda 21 regarding sustainable development information for decision-making. In particular, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and several agencies involved in the implementation of Agenda 21 do not have representation at the national level where the process is implemented. UNEP stated that its suggestion, following the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, to establish a development watch in order to monitor development information for decision-making, appeared to have fallen on barren ground and that thought could be given to resurrecting that idea.

B. Sustainable development indicators

28. In 1997, the General Assembly recommended that the Commission's approved programme of work on sustainable development indicators "result in a practicable and agreed set of indicators, suited to country-specific conditions, including a limited number of aggregated indicators". Such indicators "should play an important role in monitoring progress towards sustainable development at the national level, and in facilitating national reporting, as appropriate" (resolution S-19/2, annex, para. 114). The programme, coordinated by the Division, represents the largest United Nations system and country collaboration to date in the development of an indicator framework and methodology, with more than 30 organizations participating. In 1996, a working list of 134 indicators and related methodology sheets had been developed; 22 countries were involved in pilot testing. In 1999, after review of the results of the testing phase, the original list was reduced to 57 indicators, grouped by themes placed under four dimensions of sustainable development: social, environmental, economic and institutional. In the course of the national testing, little time could be devoted to studying the possible linkages between these four dimensions, as had been requested by the Commission. With the sponsorship of the European Statistical Office, the Division launched a study to analyse major initiatives in this area. Given the results of the initial study, it is felt that further work should relate to applications to the Commission's indicators. In May 1999, in their discussions on indicators and decision-making processes, experts at the science and policy dialogue workshop sponsored by the International Institute for Sustainable Development, held in Costa Rica, agreed on the acute need for information on how sustainable development indicators affect decision-making. Some officials involved in testing the indicators stated to OIOS that, in their country, it was too early to assess how indicators were used for decision-making. In that respect, it was noted that, recently, a number of initiatives such as the OECD frameworks to measure sustainable development had focused on the development of frameworks to place indicators in context, with the expectation that indicators were constructed whose information content, and thus potential use on policy grounds, justified the development.

29. It is considered important to ensure that the sustainable development indicators are compatible with indicators that have been developed and utilized elsewhere in the United Nations system to measure progress in the attainment of the international development goals. Members of the Inter-Agency Committee stated to OIOS that it would be useful to involve United Nations agencies more directly in the selection of indicators and field-testing process, particularly for those indicators of relevance to specialized agencies which, frequently, have parallel activities regarding sustainable development indicators. Among different initiatives, the Secretary-General considered that the common country assessment indicator framework "has the broadest scope of all existing indicator sets, as it is based on the outcome of all United Nations conferences and summits". However, the framework still has to be "validated in close cooperation with national Governments and the

specialized agencies" (E/2000/60, para. 36). Also, this framework is primarily designed to focus on the key dimension of poverty. In this context, the Economic and Social Council reiterated its invitation to the Statistical Commission to review the work undertaken in harmonizing and rationalizing basic indicators, "taking fully into account the decisions taken in other functional and regional commissions and, in that process, to identify a limited number of common indicators from among those currently accepted and widely used by the States Members of the United Nations, in order to lessen the data provision burden on [States]" (resolution 2000/27, para. 9).

C. Facilitating access to information

Web site

30. In response to decisions of the Commission, the Division launched, in 1998, the sustainable development web site (www.un.org/esa/sustdev) to facilitate access by Governments and non-State actors to information in electronic form. Following the parameters adopted during inter-agency consultations, the site is organized primarily by country, indicator and issue, and is characterized by multiple links both to web sites of United Nations organizations and to official national web sites. Respondents to OIOS surveys indicated that the information available was generally useful to those who needed updates related to upcoming sessions of the Commission. However, despite the links established between sustainable development web sites, users could not easily extract from the different sites information by country or specific issue. The Division stated that it was currently working with Carnegie Mellon University on a database that would make the information more accessible. Another factor limiting outreach by the Division through its web site was the lack of connectivity infrastructure in a number of countries, as stated by a large proportion of representatives of major groups responding to the OIOS survey. Government delegates expressed the need for dedicated information tools (see para. 12 above). One such tool, the Small Islands Developing States Network (SIDSnet), developed as a project of the UNDP Sustainable Development Networking Programme and now maintained by the Division's Small Islands Developing States Unit, connects the small island developing States through an internet-based network (www.sidsnet.org) and is used to build consensus around islands issues, to take action and to exchange knowledge and information. UNEP stated to OIOS that the Division, UNEP and numerous others had done excellent work on, for example, the small island developing States, but through lack of coordination that had not been presented in an up-to-date and coordinated package. There was also a need for a site where the general public could find up-to-date overviews on sustainable development. It was a matter that has not yet been addressed in the implementation of chapter 36 of Agenda 21, Promoting education, public awareness and training, for which the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was the Inter-Agency Committee task manager. The Division needs to review progress achieved in this area by UNESCO and the difficulties encountered.

Publications

31. The Division's programme of publications has focused on the dissemination of case studies, good practices and tools. The print run is about 3,000 copies. Most copies are distributed free of charge to government and major group representatives attending meetings and workshops sponsored by the Division. The Division stated to OIOS that the documents were extremely well-received by the public. However, the number of sales copies sold remains within the low range of a few hundred. It is noted that the publications were not planned or designed as sales publications. In its publishing endeavours, the Division shares, with others in the Secretariat, shortcomings that should be remedied: no focal point is responsible for coordinating the programme, avoiding duplication with other programmes and ensuring adherence to quality control standards. Papers have been prepared in one unit without review of their contents by the relevant specialists working elsewhere in the Division. Members of the Inter-Agency Committee stated to OIOS that the value of success stories collected from different organizations could have been enhanced through joint review by the Committee. The question of the effectiveness of the United Nations programme of publications has been raised in several evaluation reports and appears to be a Secretariat-wide problem. OIOS needs to review the management of the publication function.

Media coverage

32. An examination of news agencies coverage of sustainable development indicates that references to the concept have been increasing since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, but that references to the work of the United Nations in this area are a decreasing proportion of this total (see table 5 below). An analysis of the full text of these stories shows that almost two thirds do not present any substantial information on sustainable development. The work of the Commission generates very little substantial coverage. The Department of Public Information stated to OIOS that its assistance to the Division for Sustainable Development with media promotion of sustainable development focused primarily on the annual sessions of the Commission. The Division for Sustainable Development believed that the Department of Public Information should develop a multi-year media strategy to guide media attention to issues and topics addressed at the Commission and that relying on ad hoc reporting of Commission deliberations is insufficient. The success of the promotional campaign for the 1999 special session of the General Assembly on small island developing States is attributed to the excellent cooperation among the Department of Public Information, the Division for Sustainable Development, SIDSnet and UNEP, as well as the emotional appeal of small islands' issues. However, OIOS did not find evidence of regular consultations between the Division for Sustainable Development and the Department of Public Information to strengthen the information programme on sustainable development and enrich its substantive contents. In its comments on an earlier draft of the present report the Department of Public Information stated that, given the fall-off in the media coverage of the Commission, the Department of Public Information had already moved towards focusing on priority issues and events that did have the potential for stimulating media interest and informing the public about sustainable development.

Table 5
Wire service stories

Subject	*1993*	*1996*	*1999*
Sustainable development	1 439	2 503	4 636
Sustainable development and the United Nations	442	521	715
Commission on Sustainable Development	107	36	57
United Nations Environment Programme	131	230	610

Source: NEXIS, an electronic database (www.nexis.com) containing the wire-service stories of most news agencies worldwide (United Nations press releases were not included).

V. Coordinated approaches to implementing sustainable development goals

33. The Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development coordinates the implementation of Agenda 21 through a task manager system (see para. 8 above), which the Administrative Committee on Coordination found, in the light of the experience gained, "a promising improvement over previous efforts at inter-agency cooperation" (A/S-19/6, annex, para. 9). Table 6 below indicates the current task managers' assignments. It should be noted that, to follow up on the implementation of the 1994 Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, an additional list of task managers was drawn up. The Inter-Agency Task Force on Forests is operating as an informal "satellite" system of task managers. The review of different coordination arrangements under the Inter-Agency Committee, which follows (paras. 34-38 below), highlights a number of achievements and shortcomings.

Table 6
Designated Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development task managers (list updated in 2000)

Task Manager	*Issue (numbers refer to chapters of Agenda 21)*
Administrative Committee on Coordination Subcommittee on Oceans and Coastal Areas	Oceans and Seas (17)
Administrative Committee on Coordination Subcommittee on Water Resources	Freshwater (18)
Division for Sustainable Development	Poverty (3)
	Consumption and production patterns (4)
	Integrated decision-making (8)
	Finance (33)
	Major groups (23-32)
	Technology (34)
	Institutional arrangements (38)
	International legal instruments (39)
	Information for decision-making (40)
FAO	Small-island developing States (-)
	Integrated land management (10)
	Forests (11)
	Mountains (13)
IAEA	Agriculture (14)
UNCHS	Radioactive wastes (22)
	Human settlements (7)
UNCTAD	Solid wastes (21)
UNDP	Trade and environment (2)
UNEP and Earthwatch	Capacity-building (37)
	Atmosphere (9)
	Desertification and drought (12)
	Information for decision-making (40)
	Biodiversity (15)
	Toxic chemicals (19)
UNESCO	Hazardous wastes (20)
	Science (35)
UNFPA	Education and awareness (36)
UNIDO	Demographics (5)
WHO	Biotechnology (16)
WMO	Health (6)
	Atmosphere (9)

A. Examples of coordination arrangements under the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development

Oceans and seas

34. In 1999, the Division for Sustainable Development prepared an overall review for the seventh session of the Commission of United Nations activities in the area of oceans and coastal areas (E/CN.17/1999/4 and Add.1). The report noted concerns about fragmentation and lack of coordination owing to the generally sectoral nature of institutions working in ocean affairs as well as communication difficulties between secretariats and staffing problems that had weakened the coordinating role expected from the secretariat of the Subcommittee on Oceans and Coastal Areas of the Administrative Committee on Coordination and its Chair. The Subcommittee is the Inter-Agency Committee's task manager in this area. The Secretary-General's report, which was to be prepared by the Subcommittee, benefited from the inputs of only some of its member organizations. The Subcommittee acts as an inter-agency facilitating mechanism for the implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (A/51/116, annex II), adopted in 1995. In 1999, the Commission expressed grave concern at the slow rate of progress in the implementation of the Programme. It had taken two years to staff and recruit the Director of the Programme's coordination office, opened in 1997, under UNEP responsibility. The development of a clearinghouse mechanism, a priority activity of the Programme, "has been hindered by the fact that the governing bodies of only three agencies have adopted resolutions in support of the Global Programme of Action" (E/CN.17/1999/4, para. 34). In 1999, in addition to continuing with its function of secretariat of the Subcommittee, the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO was appointed Chair of the Subcommittee, a decision that solved to a great extent the coordination and communication problems noted in the report. The Subcommittee took action to respond to criticisms of lack of transparency by disseminating more actively information on the work of the United Nations in this area. The Subcommittee is coordinating the development of the United Nations Atlas of the Oceans, a web and CD-ROM-based catalogue of information on all aspects of the oceans. In addition, in 2000, the Chair of the Subcommittee and several members participated in the new United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea, established by the General Assembly in its resolution 54/33 of 24 November 1999 following the recommendation of the Commission at its seventh session. Regarding the earlier difficulties in this area, members of the Inter-Agency Committee stated to OIOS that in such cases they would have expected the Division for Sustainable Development to be aware of problems of coordination as they arose and to propose early remedies to the organizations involved.

Water resources

35. The Division for Sustainable Development assumed the functions of secretariat of the Subcommittee on Water Resources of the Administrative Committee on Coordination, which is the Inter-Agency Committee task manager for this topic. In 1998, the Commission invited the Subcommittee "to make its work more transparent through, inter alia, regular briefings to Governments, to enhance coordination within the United Nations system and to accelerate the implementation of chapter 18 [of Agenda 21]".[18] The Subcommittee reviewed its methods of work. The review, in particular, noted that the production of reports absorbed a significant part of the resources available to the Subcommittee and that the reports describe issues at a high level of generality and were perceived to be largely unread by the intergovernmental bodies. In 2000, the Subcommittee adopted measures for more efficient coordination of its work and discussed the possibility of undertaking common activities to, inter alia, support national implementation of Agenda 21 and offer global leadership in freshwater management. Organizations were willing to take the lead in such areas as drinking water guidelines (World Health Organization (WHO)) and the *World Water Development Report* (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)). It was agreed that when issues needed common urgent action, the Chairpersons and the Secretary of the Subcommittee should be proactive in mobilizing members, as had been the case with the Subcommittee initiative on arsenic contamination of drinking water. Members of the Inter-Agency Committee stated to OIOS that, to play its role fully, the Subcommittee's secretariat — one permanent officer who left the unit in 2000 — should be

strengthened. The *World Water Development Report* is now prepared in response to a request by the Commission at its sixth session to provide periodic assessments in this area. It is conceived as the central product of a programme hosted by UNESCO. This programme is seen by UNESCO as the first long-term cooperation undertaking among 23 institutions of the United Nations system under the auspices of the Administrative Committee on Coordination Subcommittee on Water Resources. Members of the Inter-Agency Committee stated to OIOS that the Subcommittee's secretariat should develop a monitoring methodology to assess the effectiveness of inter-agency collaboration with regard to this programme and to priority areas for collaborative efforts.

Energy

36. In the 1997 review of implementation of Agenda 21, it was noted that cooperation and coordination within the United Nations system for energy-related programmes was rather ad hoc and that although energy issues could be addressed in the Inter-Agency Committee, there was no systematic inter-agency dialogue (E/CN.17/1997/7 and Corr.1, para. 54). The discussion of issues related to energy was scheduled for the Commission at its ninth session, in 2001, with preparations initiated two years in advance, in conjunction with inter-sessional meetings of the Commission. To prepare for the deliberations on energy in the Commission and support the work of the new Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, the Inter-Agency Committee established, in 1998, the Ad Hoc Inter-Agency Task Force on Energy, chaired by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Resources were not available to set up, within the Department, a dedicated secretariat composed of energy specialists seconded on a full-time basis from other organizations, but a number of them expressed their readiness to support the process through "undertaking of specific tasks, provisions of consultative services, and part-time secondments" (ACC/1998/12, para. 33). In 2000, the Task Force had agreed on general principles for a common system-wide approach and on the main elements to include in that area of work. The Committee on Energy and Natural Resources considered that, after the ninth session of the Commission, the Task Force could act as a vehicle for implementing intergovernmental decisions in this area, including General Assembly resolution 54/215 of 22 December 1999 on the World Solar Programme 1996-2005 coordinated by UNESCO — and subsequently resolution 55/205 of 20 December 2000. Efforts to bring the Programme into the mainstream of United Nations activities have not been successful so far despite the attention given by the Task Force at its earlier meetings.

Forests

37. The open-ended Intergovernmental Panel on Forests, established in 1995, followed in 1997 by the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests, was serviced by an experienced team assembled on very short notice mainly through secondment from international organizations — UNEP, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), UNDP and the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) — supported by donor Governments. The Division for Sustainable Development administered this secretariat. Its tasks included developing and maintaining an effective communication system between the Panel/Forum, and the large number of organizations, treaty secretariats and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) involved in the process. The Panel/Forum process, highly successful in building consensus on difficult issues, was further supported by various government-led initiatives that involved sponsorships of meetings of experts and preparation of background documents by its secretariat. The process led to the establishment, in 2001, of a new permanent body under the Economic and Social Council, the United Nations Forum on Forests. During the period, the secretariat has also facilitated collaboration among members of the informal Inter-agency Task Force on Forests established in 1995 to coordinate the inputs of international organizations to the forest policy process. The Task Force is chaired by the Deputy Director-General of FAO, also task manager of Agenda 21. It should be noted that members of the Task Force implement forests programmes well established in their own organization, which is not the case for all areas of Agenda 21. In 1997, the Task Force prepared an implementation plan for the Panel's proposals for action, which were addressed to international organizations. The plan was reviewed in 1999 and had to be scaled down in view of insufficient funding.

Small island developing States

38. As requested in the Programme of Action adopted at the 1994 Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States a small island developing States unit was placed within the Division for Sustainable Development to provide secretariat support for both intergovernmental and inter-agency coordination mechanisms. With the assistance of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and a number of other programmes, the Governments of small island developing States prepared project portfolios for eventual presentation to a donors' conference. A meeting of representatives of donors and small island developing States was organized in 1999 to promote an exchange of views on the plans and priorities of these States. A year later, it was noted that little progress had been made so far in implementing some 300 projects that small island developing States had submitted to the meeting in February 1999 (A/55/78-E/2000/56, para. 60). In September 1999, at the special session for the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action, the General Assembly underlined the need to accelerate implementation in the "areas of capacity-building, financing and technology transfer, and that institutional arrangements should be strengthened" (resolution S-22/2, annex). The Heads of State and Government of the Alliance of Small Island States requested the designation of small island developing States focal points in all United Nations agencies and recommended that the Small Island Developing States Unit of the Division for Sustainable Development be revitalized and mandated to undertake the overall coordination and facilitation of efforts to implement the Programme of Action within the United Nations system. The number of Inter-Agency Committee task managers specifically responsible for the follow-up to the Conference increased from 7 to 14. In 2000, however, the review of implementation of the Programme of Action carried out by the Small Island Developing States Unit concluded that further consideration needed to be given to information-gathering and sharing of responsibility "among the United Nations agencies, the regional organizations and national Governments on tasks that are planned as well as ongoing" (A/55/185, para. 63). One of the difficulties to ensure effective follow-up is that in most organizations the officer designated for reporting on the issue is not formally assigned the task or does not manage a portfolio of activities related to small island developing States, as is the case in other areas, such as energy and forests. It should be noted that conferences of parties to conventions related to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development insist on this requirement of formal designation but most organizations cannot follow through with the requests.

B. Strengthening the Inter-Agency Committee task managers system

39. In 2000, the review of the coordinated implementation of Agenda 21 concluded that difficulties faced by the United Nations system could be attributed to constraints such as "lack of financial resources, inadequate institutional capacity, cumbersome reporting relationships and inconsistent decision-making by the governing bodies of United Nations agencies" (A/55/78, para. 58). Members of the Inter-Agency Committee stated to OIOS that, since 1997, the coordination of reporting to the Commission had increasingly monopolized the Committee's attention to the detriment of policy development and decisions on joint actions. Not all the officers carrying task manager functions in their organization attended meetings of the Inter-Agency Committee. The needed coordination mechanisms established within a few organizations were sometimes dormant. At the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, two inter-divisional thematic groups were established early in 1999 to enhance intra-departmental consultations, on financing for development and on poverty eradication, but they did not enable the Division for Sustainable Development to develop stronger links with other areas of work of the Department. Working-level contacts were more successfully maintained when a task substantively meaningful and technically well-defined was at hand, as was the case for the preparation of the ninth session of the Commission on energy issues, or when collaboration among a small number of programmes was required, as was the case with the stakeholders process on industry coordinated by UNEP and the Division for Sustainable Development, in follow-up to the sixth session of the Commission.

40. The development of the task manager system has increased the demands placed on the Division: there were 16 task managers in 1993 and 36 in 2000. This does not include the development of sub-systems under the subcommittees of the Administrative Committee on Coordination, the task forces and the small islands

issue. The Division itself was assigned the function of task manager for 5 issues in 1993 and 11 in 2000. For each issue where it is not task manager, the Division designated one focal point, among its staff, to carry out its overall coordinating function. The focal points may have to assume some of the functions of the task managers, as was seen in paragraph 34 above for the reporting on oceans and coastal areas. It should be noted that the same Division officer who is the focal point for oceans and coastal areas is also the focal point for five other topics. Also, staff continuity in the Division is affected by staffing shortfalls owing, in particular, to a combination of staff attrition and a lack of timely recruitment. Members of the Inter-Agency Committee stated to OIOS that, as a result, the Division was not always in a position to maintain an adequate level of interaction between the Committee's meetings and to initiate consultations on new initiatives. The Division had been designated task manager in some areas where other programmes had well-established mandates and expertise, as for example in the area of consumption and production patterns where the UNEP Division of Technology, Industry and Economics had a dedicated unit, or in the area of poverty, one of the main areas of focus of UNDP and of the DESA Division for Social Policy and Development. The Division for Sustainable Development needed to enter in consultation with its Inter-Agency Committee partners to streamline its responsibilities not strictly derived from its Inter-Agency Committee secretariat function. In the light of the experience gained, the responsibilities of the secretariat and task managers needed to be defined in terms of concrete actions expected from them.

41. In 1997, the General Assembly considered that the Inter-Agency Committee and its system of task managers should be strengthened to enhance system-wide cooperation "for the implementation of Agenda 21 and for the promotion of coordinated follow-up to the major United Nations conferences in the area of sustainable development" (resolution S-19/2, annex, para. 120). Subsequently, the Inter-Agency Committee discussed measures aimed at avoiding multiple inter-agency mechanisms of policy coordination at the global level. At the end of 2000, the Administrative Committee on Coordination established two new high-level committees — one on management and the other on programmes. They were requested to review the existing subsidiary machinery of the Administrative Committee on Coordination, keeping permanent bodies to a minimum, and to report to the Committee at its Spring 2001 session. The new Administrative Committee on Coordination Committee on Programme was, inter alia, to maximize support for the tasks managers and lead agency approaches that should guide the functioning of the reformed Administrative Committee on Coordination machinery (ACC/2000/20, para. 32). It would also provide oversight of effective programme implementation at the country level, taking into account the limited field-level capacity of members of the Administrative Committee on Coordination, and ensure interface with relevant coordination mechanisms, such as the United Nations Development Group. The question of cooperation with "the conferences of the parties to conventions signed at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development or as a result of it, as well as other conventions related to sustainable development" raised by the General Assembly (resolution S-19/2, annex, para. 118) is being addressed in part by UNEP and the convention secretariats. National officials responding to the OIOS survey stated that convergence would be needed between the multiple international strategies and frameworks that presently exist. Among several related initiatives, the OECD convened in November 2000 a workshop on the theme of poverty reduction strategies, comprehensive development framework and national strategies for sustainable development: towards convergence, attended by government experts, and representatives of the United Nations and other international organizations.

VI. Dialogue with and involvement of major groups

Involvement in the Commission on Sustainable Development

42. By coining the term "major groups", Governments at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development recognized both the unprecedented number and diversity of social and economic actors that contributed to the process and whose "commitment and genuine involvement" would be "critical to the effective implementation" of decisions taken at the Conference (Agenda 21, para. 23.1). The major groups whose involvement is sought by Agenda 21 are the following:

(a) Women;

(b) Children and youth;

(c) Indigenous people and their communities;

(d) Non-governmental organizations;

(e) Local authorities;

(f) Workers and their trade unions;

(g) Business and industry groups;

(h) Scientific and technological community;

(i) Farmers.

At its second session, the Commission on Sustainable Development acknowledged "the need to improve the quality of information about the problems, needs and contributions of major groups to the implementation of Agenda 21".[19] In 1995, the Division for Sustainable Development, in collaboration with the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives, organized a series of events highlighting the role of local authorities. At its third session, the Commission "requested that similar projects and activities highlighting the role of other major group sectors be carried out in future years".[20] Throughout the years, new forms of major group participation were devised, such as the multi-stakeholder dialogue segments, which came out of NGO proposals at the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) and were endorsed by the General Assembly in 1996 (resolution 51/177). The dialogue segments developed as an action-oriented dialogue at the Commission between Governments and major groups on a specific economic sector. This form of dialogue has led to follow-up actions, such as the multi-stakeholder processes and consultations to further the understanding of the potential and impact of voluntary initiatives and agreements in achieving sustainable development. These processes were launched after the multi-stakeholder dialogue segment at the sixth session of the Commission on the role of industry with the support of the Commission. As a result of their participation in the work of the Commission, major groups have formed alliances, networks and caucuses, with increased information-sharing and joint initiatives. For example, the NGO Steering Committee to the Commission, established in 1994, currently comprises representatives of 25 issue caucuses, 5 major groups and 25 regional groupings. Each issue caucus is coordinated by a team of one Southern and one Northern member. To support major groups participation in the Commission, in addition to its annual Guidelines and its web site, the Division for Sustainable Development also publishes a newsletter, *CSD Update*.

43. In 1996, the Commission on Sustainable Development requested "United Nations organizations to foster the emerging trends towards greater openness and transparency with respect to major groups".[21] Since 1997, the Division's Guidelines for Major Groups — an innovation in the United Nations system — have provided information on how these groups can contribute to the Commission's work and encourages their inputs into the reporting process as they will strengthen the overall analysis on a given issue and increase the validity of the recommendations made. Inputs may be sent to the Division or directly to the relevant organizations. To improve the reporting process and assist United Nations organizations with information collection and analysis, the Secretary-General recommended "establishing formal links between the task manager and a lead network organization from each major group sector" (E/CN.17/1997/2/Add. 22, para. 112). The degree of interaction with major groups varies among organizations and the Division is not in a position to monitor progress.

Difficulties

44. Some 80 per cent of major group representatives associated with the Steering Committee responding to the OIOS survey stated that the work of the Commission had had a positive impact on their activities. However, most of them stated that they had not received the assistance needed to participate effectively in the Commission. A number of difficulties were attributed to the lack of information in several languages, the need to reach additional groups each year as the Commission's agenda moved onto different topics, and insufficient analysis of their inputs in documentation submitted to the Commission. Representatives of national councils on sustainable development who met at a forum, organized in conjunction with the eighth session of the Commission would have welcomed a longer lead time and more thorough regional consultations in advance of the meeting to consolidate better their respective positions on the issues considered at the Commission. Officers of the NGO Steering Committee stated to OIOS that no information on the methodological framework for the

Commission dialogue sessions was available for new stakeholders groups.

45. It is acknowledged that, in general, the "lack of financial means and inadequate access to relevant information have prevented southern NGOs from contributing as much as NGOs, based in the North, to the policy dialogue conducted in the United Nations forums" (A/53/170, para. 66). Since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, the Non-governmental Liaison Service has raised funds to facilitate the participation in United Nations meetings or conferences of over 700 representatives of NGOs, almost entirely from developing nations. Resources deployed by Division and the NGO Steering Committee succeeded in ensuring, at certain sessions of the Commission, a near parity in the participation of major group representatives from the South. In this respect, the NGO Steering Committee's Southern Caucus expressed to OIOS great satisfaction with the support to its efforts received from the Division and the Non-governmental Liaison Service.

46. Another difficulty in promoting major groups involvement lies in the fact that Agenda 21 does not define the major groups concept itself, which leads to practical problems in delineating the groups and supporting their participation at all levels. The Inter-Agency Committee stressed that the 2002 review, "building on the experience gained in the Commission" regarding the involvement of the major groups, should ensure that the Summit outcomes "further define the role of these constituencies" in sustainable development work. (ACC/2000/1, para. 13). The proposals to encourage participation of major groups at the national level, including achieving representation of all major group sectors in the national sustainable development coordinating mechanisms, submitted by the Division, were adopted by the Commission in 1995. The involvement of major groups in national coordinating mechanisms is increasing. However, a continuing problem is the lack of "clear guidelines for the participation of major groups in the operational activities of the United Nations, as well as other multilateral bodies" noted in 1997 (E/CN.17/1997/2/Add. 22, para. 104).

VII. Support to international cooperation and national programmes

A. Support to international cooperation

47. The 1997 review conveyed a sense that "the primary challenge for the immediate future lies in moving from the policy development phase to implementation" (E/CN.17/1997/5, para. 117). As a means to achieve greater implementation, the General Assembly called upon the Commission to "promote increased regional implementation of Agenda 21 in cooperation with relevant regional and subregional organizations and the United Nations regional commissions" (resolution S-19/2, annex, para. 121). In 1998, the second consultative meeting of regional institutions organized by the Division, attended by the regional commissions, regional development banks and other institutions, recognized that an increasing number of institutions were playing a role and having positive impacts on the implementation of Agenda 21. However, the proliferation of actors was making it difficult to monitor the results and effectiveness of those efforts. It was considered that an important role for regional institutions was to define further and identify concrete problems in the region in keeping with the thematic areas of Agenda 21 and that the Division should continue its identification, compilation and comparison of national priorities in close consultation with the relevant organizations.

48. Between 1998 and 2000, in collaboration with the regional commissions, regional institutions and UNDP, the Division organized three regional consultative meetings with national policy-makers. The meetings objectives were to exchange national experiences in formulating and implementing national sustainable development strategies, to analyse how regional cooperation in sustainable development had been promoted and to strengthen the Commission's regional links. A large proportion of participants belonged to the environmental sector and an important component of the meetings was to identify key characteristics relevant to the region that would distinguish sustainable development strategies from environmental action plans. National experts responding to the OIOS survey stated that, after such meetings, they had remained in contact with experts from other countries. Such interactions contribute to south-south

cooperation, as do other activities reviewed in the present report, for example SIDSnet (para. 30 above).

49. The regional commissions have integrated sustainable development orientations in their programmes in accordance with priorities set by their member countries:

(a) The development by ECA of a computer simulation model to illustrate interactions between population changes, the environment, economic development and agriculture (the PEDA model). The Commission organized a high-level stakeholders meeting in January 2000 to build a common understanding of sustainable development among African institutions;

(b) Normative and monitoring work taking place in the context of ECE conventions and other regional agreements. Programmes in the areas of energy, transport and timber were particularly influenced by decisions made at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. ECE supports the activities of the European Joint Meeting on Transport and the Environment. At ECE, a significant amount of resources is allocated to activities related to sustainable development, as can be seen in the example provided in paragraph 26 above;

(c) The organization of sustainable development indicator workshops by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in close collaboration with the Division. The progress of implementation of the Regional Action Programme for Environmentally Sound and Sustainable Development, 2001-2005, will be monitored using a set of indicators agreed upon by an intergovernmental expert group;

(d) Programme streamlining by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) around a number of topics, which correspond to the crucial areas of sustainable development, identified by the Commission: energy, transport, fresh water, oceans and tourism. In addition, ECLAC has been particularly active in the region in the follow-up of several chapters of Agenda 21, mainly on such issues as combating poverty, trade and environment, integrating environment and development in decision making, indigenous peoples, business and industry, regional assessment of financing for development and fiscal policies, as well as capacity-building. The ECLAC subregional office at Port-of-Spain supports implementation of the Small Island Developing States Programme of Action in the Caribbean, operating as interim secretariat together with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM);

(e) At ESCWA, participation of the Energy, Natural Resources and Environment Division, with the Division for Sustainable Development, in the world energy assessment, the inter-agency task force on energy and the Administrative Committee for Coordination Subcommittee on Water Resources.

50. Officials at the regional commissions stated to OIOS that, as no regional entity had been designated Inter-Agency Committee task manager to coordinate inputs to the Commission, their contributions tended to be diluted in reports focused on topical sections of Agenda 21. It is recalled that the Commission is expected to "provide a forum for the exchange of experience on regional and subregional initiatives" (General Assembly resolution S-19/2, annex, para. 133 (c)). ECA believes that there is room for increased collaboration with the Division for Sustainable Development in the definition of key elements of sustainable development and the implementation of the recommendations of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

B. Support to national programmes

1. Sustainable development strategies and programmes

51. In 1997, the General Assembly set the target of national sustainable development strategies to be completed in all countries, with the participation of all sectors of society, by 2002. The Assembly recommended that "the efforts of developing countries in effectively implementing national strategies be supported" (resolution S-19/2, annex, para. 24 (a)); UNDP and a number of other organizations provided support at the national and local levels. According to the Inter-Agency Committee inventory of various workshops organized by the United Nations system that contribute to the goals of sustainable development, over 150 such workshops had been organized in 1998 in all regions. The UNDP Capacity 21 Trust Fund supports a range of cross-sectoral sustainable development programmes in 75 countries. At the local level, among several programmes, local Agenda 21 action plans were prepared and implemented by more

than 1,800 local Governments in 64 countries. In 2000, 146 countries had reported to the Division for Sustainable Development the establishment of national coordination mechanisms and actions taken to implement Agenda 21.

52. However, despite these efforts, few countries have articulated sustainable development strategies that can be seen as important steps to implement government policies on economic development and integrate sustainable development into various plans and programmes for national economic and social development, as China's Agenda 21 does. In 1997, in order to ensure a stronger focus in inter-agency collaboration on practical implementation, the Inter-Agency Committee agreed on the need to elaborate a system of guidelines, which, inter alia, would "facilitate the translation of goals agreed at the international level into national policy-making and planning" (ACC/1997/12, paras. 16 and 18). In 1998, the Inter-Agency Committee reviewed the work done, as a first step, on the compilation and assessment of existing guidelines. The Committee found that the results were mixed but it encouraged agencies to continue with those efforts. In parallel, UNDP, the task manager for capacity-building, was invited to revive the Task Force on Sustainable Development Strategies, with little results to this day. Regarding the gap between conference outcomes and the objectives and priorities of the United Nations system assistance programme, the Secretary-General concluded that "country-specific tools and advice, country-specific frameworks and models, and appropriate base-line data all need further development. It must also be recalled that most decision-making and funding continue on a sectoral basis, internationally and nationally" (E/2000/46/Add.1, para. 70).

53. In 1999, in large part with funds made available through the Development Account, established in 1998 as part of the Secretary-General's programme for reform, the Division for Sustainable Development was able to initiate activities in support of national sustainable development strategies. Activities focus on improving information systems for decision-making and strengthening capacity in the sustainable development planning process. It is expected that they will cover 10 countries. Twinning between countries would promote South-South cooperation. It is too early to assess the result of such activities.

54. In their response to the OIOS survey, two thirds of the national experts who attended meetings sponsored by the Division for Sustainable Development between 1996 and 2000 stated that national reporting to the Commission and the formulation of national strategies had had a positive influence for the implementation of Agenda 21 in their country. However, more than half of the respondents stated that the support provided by international organizations had had little influence. Regarding activities that the Division should strengthen, priority was given to information dissemination and information exchange, cited 18 times by the respondents, while technical assistance and the coordination of expert meetings were cited seven times each.

2. Programme of technical assistance of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs

55. The Division for Sustainable Development formulates and executes, at the request of Governments, multidisciplinary programmes and projects in areas where, after the 1997 reorganization of the Secretariat, it acquired special expertise, that is in water resources management, energy and transport, infrastructure and land management, and mineral resources. After the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, these activities, previously carried out within the Department for Development Support and Management Services, had been reoriented to the extent possible to promote integrated resource management and the use of environmentally sound technologies. In 2000, 86 per cent of the 151 projects in the portfolio of the Division for Sustainable Development were related to water resources, energy and transport. A third of these projects were launched after the 1997 reorganization.

Energy and transport

56. The Department for Development Support and Management Services had been one of the two largest executing agencies, with the World Bank, of the UNDP energy assistance programme. A UNDP evaluation of the programme noted that it had concentrated on conventional energy areas and that the few projects directed towards renewable sources of energy did not seem to have had any meaningful results. It concluded that given the importance placed on sustainable development by recent United Nations resolutions, a

valuable opportunity for new initiatives was being missed. Since then, UNDP has developed its Initiative for Sustainable Energy adopted by its Executive Committee as the Programme's corporate policy with regard to energy and development. In the 2000 portfolio of the Division for Sustainable Development, new and renewable sources of energy projects are still much smaller than other energy projects; however, in this sector, the portfolio is growing at a much faster rate. The Division participates in one of the largest technological aid projects concerning renewable energies in the world, launched by the Government of China in 1999 and funded by the Global Environment Facility, UNDP and bilateral donors. According to the April 2000 progress report of UNESCO on the World Solar Programme 1996-2005, the project focuses on accelerating the capacity to build up the commercialization of renewable energy in China. Increased attention to the transport sector, whose "dominant patterns of energy use are not sustainable" (General Assembly resolution S-19/2, annex, para. 47), has not yet resulted in increased technical assistance from the Division. In this sector, consultations were held in 1999 with the regional commissions, a few of which have sizeable transport programmes. In this respect, ECA stated to OIOS that the issue of rundown railway systems in developing countries — especially in African countries — deserved attention. With increasing urbanization and proliferation of transport and fossil fuel use, pollution and emission of greenhouse gases were becoming important. Related analytical work is carried out for the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources for Development. The Committee believes that one of the outcomes of the ninth session of the Commission should be the formulation of a programme of action in the field of energy and sustainable development.

Water

57. Continuing the work done under the Department for Development Support and Management Services, the Division implemented technical cooperation programmes and projects relating to water resources and provided technical advisory services to several developing countries and countries with economies in transition. Using the natural water basin as a reference, the Division promoted strategic approaches that would achieve more efficient management of current and projected competition for water resources. The Division is also addressing the issues of international waters. During the 1990s, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and several conferences on fresh water stressed the need for the integration of sectoral plans and programmes within the framework of national economic and social policy. However, "progress in the implementation of chapter 18 of Agenda 21 and of the Water Conferences has been inadequate" (E/CN.17/2000/13, para. 65). Several members of the Inter-Agency Committee commented that despite the publication of different water policy papers and the convening of numerous workshops there were very few new initiatives to promote and execute integrated water management plans. Funding is almost non-existent for the comprehensive assessments on which strategic water management plans can be based. In the energy sector, the Division has been helpful in facilitating the project approval process of the Global Environment Facility. The Division is also developing a directory of various small-size funds that support projects on consumption and production patterns. In its comments on an earlier draft of the present report, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) stated that the Division should use to a greater extent the Administrative Committee for Coordination Subcommittee on Water Resources to coordinate United Nations water-related programmes. However, it considered that weakened technical cooperation capacity in many United Nations agencies compromised the ability of the Division and the United Nations as a whole successfully to set examples in the implementations of strategic programmes in member countries. The more pronounced weakening of capacity in the water resources management domain described in paragraphs 59 and 60 below requires urgent attention and the definition of a new programme strategy.

Lessons learned process

58. One of the objectives of the 1997 reorganization was to facilitate the feedback of lessons learned at the country level into the international policy development process. In the Division, lessons learned contributions are made in the form of discussion papers submitted to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources and other groups, summaries of the outcome of pilot projects included in the success stories collection of the Division, and compendium of past projects such as the publication entitled "Chronicle of the United Nations Mineral Resources Exploration in Developing Countries, 1958-1993". Unfortunately, there is no budget for these activities, which are carried out as a

marginal by-product of technical assistance work. The information that exists is not analysed systematically to assess its value for the design of new strategies and programmes, at the field level, or for the Division's policy-analysis work. Development Account funding has been received by the Division to establish a network of national institutions, in Africa and the South Pacific, and to create a water virtual learning centre. This project would benefit from the country-specific experience of technical assistance that resides in the Division and the United Nations specialized agencies but, unfortunately, the funding arrangements are such that no resources can be set aside for such contribution.

Resources

59. The Division's technical assistance is funded in part by the regular programme of technical cooperation — $2.3 million for the biennium 1998-1999 under section 21 of the programme budget — and by extrabudgetary resources, which consist of UNDP funds and direct government contributions to the Division — $22 million and $1 million respectively, in 1999. Table 7 below shows a slight decrease of extra budgetary resources since 1996, overall, with an increase in the energy sector.

60. More worrisome, the proportion of funds expended in relation to budget decreased from 66 per cent in 1996 to 44 per cent in 1999. It should be noted that, in 1990, the budget of the Natural Resources and Energy Division of the Department of Technical Cooperation for Development, implementing a relatively comparable programme of work with similar funding arrangements, was $85.3 million and delivery was $70.7 million. Among the most common reasons given by the staff of the Division for Sustainable Development for the present performance were UNDP policy for national execution and the drastic reduction of technical advisor posts — with loss of critical mass in a number of fields, as a consequence, as well as difficulties created by the transfer to the Department of Management of procurement services, previously provided in an integrated manner by the Department for Development Support and Management Services. There were more than 20 technical advisory posts — Section 21 and overhead advisors — during the biennium 1992-1993, 12 in 1996-1997 and 8 in 1998-1999. In the water resources field there were nine technical advisors in 1992 and only two in 2000.

61. During the 1990s, owing to a marked decline in UNDP resources handled by agencies and the change towards national execution policies, the Department for Development Support and Management Services was unable to maintain technical assistance at the level of activity achieved earlier. In relation to the historical decrease of UNDP funding, it appears that the managers in charge of the programme did not attempt early on to diversify its sources of funding as much as other programmes did. The Board of Auditors noted that, at the United Nations, about 27.4 per cent of all technical cooperation activity during the biennium 1998-1999 was financed by UNDP and the United Nations Populations Fund (UNFPA).[22] This proportion is much higher for the Division. The members of the Inter-Agency Committee believe that a strategic reorientation is required. They underscore that, with the resources presently available to it, the Division's technical assistance is still, in United Nations terms, a sizeable programme. At UNCTAD, $33 million was available during the biennium 1998-1999 for all operational projects. It is projected that $20 million will be available to the largest technical cooperation programme of UNCTAD, Services infrastructure for development and trade efficiency, to deliver the following activities during the biennium 2000-2001: 50 advisory missions, 16 training programmes and support to 80 field projects.

62. The problem is not specific to the Division. In June 2000, the project portfolio of the Department for Economic and Social Affairs for 2001 was only $10 million, against a future year portfolio of $23 million at June 1999, which raised serious questions about the viability of the Department's technical assistance programme for 2001. Technical assistance personnel believe that there is, as yet, no clear vision of the role of technical cooperation within the Department. Several approaches to reverse the trend were discussed, including greater involvement of the Department in the common country assessment process (see para. 27 above). A departmental strategic review was initiated. The results of this review were not known at the time the present report was prepared.

Table 7

Technical assistance projects of the Division for Sustainable Development funded through the United Nations Development Programme and government contributions by budget and delivery of the operational projects implemented by the Division[a]

(Thousands of United States dollars)

	1996 [b]		*1999*	
Main field of activity	*Budget*	*Implemented*	*Budget*	*Implemented*
Energy	6 040	3 394	8 428	3 186
Transport	4 021	3 169	3 143	1 864
Water	13 991	9 212	9 721	4 221
Minerals	2 382	1 859	1 035	620
Total all activities	**26 959**	**17 823**	**23 201**	**10 300**

[a] Excludes the energy-related project in Iraq. The project, implemented since 1997 under Security Council resolution 986 (1995) mandates, is not a recurrent programme component; in 1999, the budget was $20.4 million and project delivery was $17.6 million.

[b] Activities implemented by the Department for Development Support and Management Services before transfer to the Division for Sustainable Development.

VIII. Conclusions and recommendations

Progress

63. **During the period under review, the Division for Sustainable Development was the secretariat of the Commission on Sustainable Development and of the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development. The Division used the Committee to bring more coherence into the efforts of the United Nations system in implementing sustainable development goals.**

64. **To follow up on decisions taken in Agenda 21 and by the Commission and the General Assembly, the Division supported the efforts of major group representatives and the Chair of the Commission to involve the major groups in the work of the Commission and in sustainable development activities in general. The development of modalities to promote this involvement is seen as one of the most innovative aspects of the Commission process. Significant progress was accomplished in the development of indicators of sustainable development, in large part thanks to the efforts of the Division. Early on, the Division coordinated expert group discussions on such issues critical to the implementation of Agenda 21 as consumption and production patterns, transfer of technology and financing. More recently, the Division promoted successfully inter-agency dialogue on such issues as energy and greater involvement of regional and subregional organizations in the work of the Commission. Considering that the implementation of Agenda 21 involves most programme areas of the United Nations in the environment, economic and social domains, the Division's influence at the programme level is limited.**

Problems

65. **The further implementation of Agenda 21 is still impaired by insufficient clarity at the conceptual level and insufficient integration of the social, economic and environmental aspects of sustainable development. The quality of information submitted to the Commission needs to be further enhanced. The work involved in the preparation of reports to the Commission needs to be streamlined to reduce the burden placed on national authorities and to enable the Inter-Agency Committee member organizations to devote more time to questions of programme implementation. The Division should be more actively involved in**

assessments of the progress of coordination of United Nations activities at the country level, particularly with the United Nations funds and programmes that are field-based, to ensure that sustainable development goals are adequately reflected in the common country assessments. The technical assistance programme added to the Division after the 1997 reorganization of the Secretariat should be developed along the lines of a strategy clarifying its purpose and potential. The recommendations presented in paragraph 66 below assume that the level of regular budget and extrabudgetary resources available to the Division would remain constant for the next biennial period. Increased contributions to the trust fund in support of the work of the Commission and to support the secondment of personnel from other organizations would facilitate the implementation of the recommendations.

66. The following recommendations are based on the findings presented in sections III to VII of the present report. References below to bodies and processes reflect developments known in early 2001. Considering the ongoing reform of the Administrative Committee for Coordination, in particular, recommendations on the work of the Inter-Agency Committee should be adjusted to apply to any agreed successor arrangement.

Recommendation 1
Facilitating intergovernmental processes

In collaboration with the members of the organizations of the Administrative Committee for Coordination, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs should identify intergovernmental processes at the global and regional levels where insufficient attention has been given to the social, economic and environmental aspects of sustainable development. As a result of this initiative, the Division for Sustainable Development should, by the end of 2002, present proposals to the Bureau of the Commission on Sustainable Development to organize focused consultations between Government representatives engaged in other intergovernmental processes and members of the Commission and its Bureau [see paras. 18-19 and 21-24 above].

Recommendation 2
Enhancing the understanding of sustainable development

(a) Policy summaries. The Division for Sustainable Development should, based on the work done in different parts of the United Nations system, prepare by the end of 2001 summaries of the main policy aspects of poverty, and consumption and production patterns — the two overriding issues of sustainable development identified in the programme of work of the Commission on Sustainable Development for 1998-2002 — as they relate to the different chapters of Agenda 21. These summaries should serve as the basis for discussions, initiated in the course of 2002, with secretariat units in other sectors of the United Nations, to integrate better the social, economic and environmental aspects of sustainable development. In the future, additional summaries should be prepared for such other issues as health and gender, as needed.

(b) Key characteristics of sustainable development programmes. The organizations members of the Inter-Agency for Sustainable Development should articulate, by the end of 2002, a set of key characteristics of sustainable development programmes that would promote a common understanding of the concept of sustainable development and its implications for policy decisions. Based on analysis of country experiences in implementing sustainable development programmes, the set of key characteristics should be formulated in terms that facilitate adaptation to country-specific conditions [see paras. 11, 20-23 and 50 above].

Recommendation 3
Streamlining reporting

(a) Reporting to the Commission on Sustainable Development. Under guidance of the Commission on Sustainable Development and its Bureau, the Division for Sustainable Development should enter into consultation with the members of the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development so that the reports issued before the sessions of the Commission focus on key elements to be addressed at the upcoming session. Other required information, of general or technical nature, should be issued at regular intervals during the inter-sessional period.

(b) National reporting:

(i) The Division for Sustainable Development should ask the members of the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development and the regional commissions to identify existing national reporting and data collection activities that would provide the non-restricted information required by the Commission on Sustainable Development;

(ii) The Division should review the potential of the common country assessment to support the reporting needs of the Commission for national information and make proposals for consideration by the Commission before the end of its tenth session, in 2002;

(iii) Under the guidance of the Commission and its Bureau, the Division should limit its requests for national information to information not readily available elsewhere in the United Nations system [see paras. 12-14, 25-27, 29 above].

Recommendation 4
Quality of information

(a) Regional perspectives:

(i) The Division for Sustainable Development should ensure that the reports prepared for the Commission on Sustainable Development or other related intergovernmental processes integrate different regional perspectives through a process of consultations with the regional offices of United Nations organizations, the regional commissions and relevant regional and subregional organizations. Consultations should be initiated at the planning stage of reporting, giving adequate attention to the critical and unresolved issues that require additional study at the regional level;

(ii) The Division should review the capacity of regional and sub-regional organizations to participate in the work envisaged in point (i) above and bring to the attention of relevant bodies problems that may exist where capacity is insufficient.

(b) Diversified sources of information. The Division for Sustainable Development should ensure that the members of the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development consolidating information for reporting to the Commission on Sustainable Development are in a position to use diversified sources of information, geographically and by sectors of activity, including contributions of the scientific community, social groups and business and industry groups, as recommended by the General Assembly in paragraph 133 (e) of the annex to its resolution S-19/2.

(c) Calendar. For the preparation of reports, the Division for Sustainable Development should propose a calendar that provides sufficient lead time for adequate consultations at each stage of the process [see paras. 12, 15, 25-27, 35, 43 and 50 above].

Recommendation 5
Facilitating access to information

(a) Access by government representatives. To facilitate government representatives' continuous access to information, the Division for Sustainable Development should take the following initiatives:

(i) Notify government representatives of the Division's contact persons for the different items on the agenda of the Commission on Sustainable Development, by the end of 2001;

(ii) Provide a summary of each report in accordance with the six-week rule and organize Secretariat briefings on key reports, highlighting policy implications of analyses presented and clarifying technical concepts, in the course of 2002;

(iii) Facilitate access to information on new developments and informal exchange of information through the means of an electronic message facility for use by government representatives, by the end of 2002.

(b) Access by the general public:

(i) The Division for Sustainable Development and the Department of Public Information should meet on a quarterly basis to identify new developments and upcoming events of interest to the media, not necessarily linked to the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development, and decide on what

information material should be prepared to better promote sustainable development. Such consultations should take place in the context of the information strategy of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs;

(ii) The Division should facilitate access by regional networks of major group organizations to information on sustainable development, which they could use for wider dissemination to their constituencies [see paras. 12, 13, 30, 32 and 42 above].

Recommendation 6
Inter-agency coordination

(a) Reformulating terms of reference. To enhance the benefits of a coordinated implementation of Agenda 21 and related commitments, the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development should review the terms of reference of the task manager function and of the secretariat of the Committee. As a result of the review, the Committee — or any successor coordination mechanism established in accordance with paragraph 38.16 of Agenda 21 — should identify:

(i) The concrete actions expected from task managers, inter alia, to maintain interactions among organizations, submit timely reporting to the Division for Sustainable Development and report on difficulties in programme implementation that may require the Division's attention;

(ii) The concrete actions expected from its secretariat, the Division, inter alia, to monitor the effectiveness of coordination arrangements, to bring to the attention of the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development new issues and to represent the Committee's concerns in other inter-agency mechanisms;

(iii) Other organizations and divisions of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs that would assume a number of task manager responsibilities presently assigned to the Division, to enable the Division to focus on its secretariat function.

(b) Secondment of experts to the Division for Sustainable Development:

(i) During the time when the Commission on Sustainable Development is focusing its work on one main topic, which requires in-depth and current knowledge of developments in the field, the Division for Sustainable Development should obtain the secondment of relevant expert personnel from United Nations organizations to coordinate the preparation of reports submitted to the Commission, to carry out liaison with the secretariats of other intergovernmental processes, and to assist the Commission, its inter-sessional groups and Bureau, at their request, with briefings, substantive advice and notes;

(ii) When the cost of such secondments cannot be covered from contributing organizations or the Division's existing resources, the Division should seek additional voluntary contributions from donor Governments [see paras. 10, 17, 35, 37, 39-40 above].

Recommendation 7
Support to national sustainable development programmes

(a) Exchange of national experience. Regarding the exchange of experience on national sustainable development strategies and programmes, the Division for Sustainable Development should, in particular:

(i) Promote the exchange of experience as a regular agenda item of regional and subregional organizations;

(ii) Support regional and subregional assessments of the implementation of sustainable development goals, in collaboration with the regional commissions and other members of the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development;

(iii) Provide to national officials reporting on national implementation of Agenda 21 the information needed to reach other national contact points working on similar issues.

(b) Use of national sustainable development strategies. Drawing from experience at the national

level and in collaboration with UNDP, the Division for Sustainable Development should monitor progress of the use of national sustainable development strategies through the common country assessment process and the work of the United Nations Development Group [see paras. 15, 20, 26, 48 and 52-54 above].

Recommendation 8
Technical assistance provided by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs

(a) Promoting capacity. As part of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs' review of its programme of technical assistance, the Division for Sustainable Development should, to promote better its capacity to assist:

(i) Identify areas where other organizations carry out similar activities with similar institutional advantages, such as the regional commissions, and maintain regular interactions with those organizations to develop a coordinated programme of assistance;

(ii) Identify areas of technical assistance where it can carry out activities, which are unique.

(b) Critical situations. In the areas of natural resources management where the Division for Sustainable Development is mandated to provide technical assistance and to take into account the results of the review referred to in point (a) above, to ensure that critical situations are not left without adequate response, the Division should:

(i) Promote multisectoral approaches, good practices and knowledge-sharing for practical application in national and local contexts, testing and evaluation;

(ii) Share with the specialized sectors in national Governments assessments on existing resources and their sustainable use. These assessments should be based on medium to long-term forecasts;

(iii) Promote the adoption of appropriate response through the common country assessment process and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework in countries where critical situations are identified and specialists in national Governments are requesting assistance [see paras. 56-62 above].

Recommendation 9
Funding of sustainable development programmes

On a biennial basis, the Division for Sustainable Development should organize an exchange of experience among members of the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development on funding sustainable development programmes, through, inter alia, reviewing experience with specialized small-size funds, access to global funds or mainstreaming sustainable development activities in broader financing for development arrangements [see paras. 24, 38, 56, 57 and 60-62].

67. The present report takes into account the recent decisions of the Commission on Sustainable Development and other intergovernmental processes related to sustainable development known in early 2001. At its tenth session, which opens on 27 April 2001, the Commission will act as an open-ended preparatory committee to the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development and as such will review progress achieved in the implementation of Agenda 21. In this capacity, the Commission is mandated, inter alia, to "address ways of strengthening the institutional framework for sustainable development and evaluate and define the role and programme of work of the Commission" (General Assembly resolution 55/199, para. 15 (e)). The Secretariat will need to implement the recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Coordination in the light of the outcome of the Summit. It is desirable that the present report, together with the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee thereon, be brought to the attention of the Commission at its tenth session.

Recommendation 10
Action by the Commission on Sustainable Development

The present report, together with the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee on Programme and Coordination thereon, should be submitted to the Commission on Sustainable

Development at its tenth session for review and action.

(*Signed*) Dileep **Nair**
Under-Secretary-General for
Internal Oversight Services

Notes

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 16* (A/55/16), part one, para. 234.

[2] *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigenda), vol. I: *Resolutions Adopted by the Conference*, resolution 1, annex I.

[3] Ibid., annex II.

[4] Ibid., para. 1.2.

[5] Ibid., para. 1.6.

[6] A/AC.237/18 (Part II)/Add.1 and Corr.1, annex I.

[7] See United Nations Environment Programme, Convention on Biological Diversity (Environmental Law and Institution Programme Activity Centre), June 1992.

[8] United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa (A/49/84/Add.2, annex, appendix II).

[9] *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigenda), vol. III, annex III.

[10] R. Medhi and S. Maljean-Dubois, "Les Nations unies et la protection de l'environnment: la promotion d'un developpement durable" Colloque International, Aix en Provence, 1999, Ed. Pedone, p. 32.

[11] *Report of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, Bridgetown, Barbados, 25 April-6 May 1994* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.94.I.18 and corrigenda), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.

[12] Economic and Social Council resolution 1998/46, annex I, para. 19.

[13] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2000, Supplement No. 9* (E/2000/29), chap. II, para. 18.

[14] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-third Session, Supplement No. 6* (A/53/6/Rev.1), para. 28.14 (b).

[15] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2000, Supplement No. 9* (E/2000/29), chap. I.B, decision 8/5, para. 4.

[16] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-third Session, Supplement No. 6* (A/53/6/Rev.1), para. 28.14 (c).

[17] Sofia Declaration on Good-Neighbourly Relations, Stability, Security and Cooperation in the Balkans, adopted at the meeting of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Countries of South-Eastern Europe, held at Sofia, on 6 and 7 July 1996 (see A/51/211-S/1996/551, annex I).

[18] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1998, Supplement No. 9* (E/1998/29), chap. I.B, decision 6/1, para. 20 (c).

[19] Ibid., *1994, Supplement No. 13* (E/1994/33/Rev.1), chap. I, para. 15.

[20] Ibid., *1995, Supplement No. 12* (E/1995/32), chap. I, para. 20.

[21] Ibid., *1996, Supplement No. 8* (E/1996/28), chap. I.C, decision 4/9, para. 2 (f).

[22] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 5* (A/55/5), vol. I, chap. I, para. 17.